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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 RABAT 000275

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SUBJECT: IRANIAN FOREIGN MINISTER'S VISIT TO MOROCCO

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Classified By: Charge d'Affaires Wayne Bush for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)
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11. (C) Summary: Prime Minister Jettou told the Ambassador on February 7 the February 5-6 visit of Iranian Foreign Minister Manouchehr Mottaki was long on protocol but short on substance. Jettou said he pressed Iran to resolve its differences with the International Community. MFA DG Azeroual elaborated to polcouns, asserting that the Iranians left Morocco empty handed, without a joint communique. Azeroual added that FM Benaissa had urged Iran to suspend enrichment in order to facilitate negotiations, and the Iranians had not pushed for Moroccan help in the IAEA. Poloff passed refel demarche, pointing out the USG view that practical relations with Iran should be curbed, not expanded.

In contrast to what we heard directly, press coverage was positive, reporting a visit that included an MOU on political consultation signed between the two Foreign Ministries. The Moroccans may be in a quandary -- trying to accommodate our concerns, but keeping on civil terms with Iran, which they see as tilted toward Algeria. The Moroccans may indeed continue to urge Iran to do the right thing, but are unlikely to try to twist their arms. End summary.

12. (SBU) The February 5-6 visit of Iranian Foreign Minister Manouchehr Mottaki received prominent coverage in the Moroccan media. Le Matin, the pro-government French daily, ran a banner headline noting "Tehran's support for a negotiated political solution in the Western Sahara" and the signature of a memorandum of understanding that "set up a mechanism for political consultations" between the two Foreign Ministries. According to Moroccan press accounts, Mottaki also received a warm welcome from Upper House Speaker Mustapha Ukasha, who was quoted supporting Iran's right to nuclear power. (English language) stories by the Iranian wire service Fars.Net portrayed the visit as a leap forward in the countries' bilateral relations.

13. (C) In a February 7 meeting to discuss an economic issue, Prime Minister Jettou characterized for the Ambassador the visit of Iranian FM Mottaki as focused on protocol, with little substance, and emphasized there is little Iranian investment or business presence in Morocco. Jettou said he had found the Iranian "surprisingly" moderate on all issues except that of nuclear energy, where he had insisted on Iran's right to develop civilian nuclear energy. Jettou said Morocco had pressed for Iran to solve its differences with the international community. On Afghanistan and Iraq, however, Jettou added, the Iranian was moderate and conciliatory*indicating that Iran strongly opposed the Taliban and supported the Karzai government, while it also wanted to see an end to bloodshed and civil strife in Iraq.

14. (C) Also on February 7, Mohammed Azeroual, Ministry of Foreign Affairs Director General for Arab and Islamic Affairs

(and former Moroccan Ambassador to Tehran) gave polcouns a more detailed briefing on the Iranian's visit. Azeroual's central message was that the visit had been light on substance, seeking to downplay any impression (as conveyed in media reports) that the visit would lead to a deepening of Morocco's relations with Iran.

¶5. (C) Azeroual asserted that FM Benaissa had pressed his Iranian guest to suspend enrichment of uranium and added that the Iranian refrained from overly harsh criticism of the U.S. "knowing our close ties." In repsonse to a question, Azeroual maintained that the Iranians had not mentioned Morocco's membership on the IAEA board of governors, nor had they sought diplomatic support from Morocco for any other international forum.

¶6. (C) Azeroual said the Moroccans were watching warily development of ties between Tehran and Algiers, including \$3 billion in Iranian economic investments there. By contrast, he stated, Iranian investments in Morocco were minimal. Trade is limited as well, mostly to Moroccan phosphate exports. Azeroual said the Iranians spoke frankly about their efforts to expand their economic reach into sub-Saharan Africa, and pitched the idea that Morocco could be a platform for Iranian investments in countries to the south, but Morocco declined to bite, he added. (Comment: this could have represented an effort to solicit Morocco to be a financial cut out. End comment.) Polcouns conveyed reftel demarche on implementing UNSC 1737, which had earlier been passed to the International Organizations Division. He strongly urged that Morocco curb, rather than expand, itsrelations in Iran, particularly anything to do with finance.

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¶7. (C) Azeroual insisted that Morocco had turned down an Iranian proposal for a joint statement at the conclusion of talks and noted that, aside from a photo-op with Benaissa at a stakeout in front of the Minister's office, there was no joint press conference. He underlined that the King did not receive Mottaki, although he often meets Foreign Ministers from other countries.

¶8. (C) Comment: The Moroccans' downplaying of the Iranian FM's visit as short on substance is not surprising, although somewhat self-serving. Press coverage was as positive as any other bilateral visit, and we will probe further on the nature of the mechanism for political consultations. The visit did likely fall short of Iranian expectations and probably did not significantly advance tangible bilateral cooperation. Most important, on the nuclear issue, Iran again heard that it should bend tointernational concerns, and received no official statment of support. Ever anxious to balance its bilateral relations to offset any advantage for Algeria, the Moroccans will probably continue to quietly say the right things to the Iranians, but are not likely to try to twist their arms. End comment.

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